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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 003067

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2013

TAGS: EU NL PREL

SUBJECT: EU COUNCIL PUTS DUTCH IN AWKWARD POSITION

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CLIFFORD SOBEL FOR REASONS 1.5 B AND D

¶1. (C) Dutch Politic...

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2003-12-15

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Embassy The Hague

CONFIDENTIAL

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¶1. (C) Dutch Political Director Hugo Siblesz told Amb Sobel on December 15 that the failure of the EU Council to agree on a constitution this weekend means that the Inter-Governmental Council (IGC) likely will continue through the Dutch presidency. He said the wounds are too raw for a solution to be easily found during the Irish presidency in the first semester of 2004. POL Counselor asked about the Dutch position on a two-speed Europe, noting that the Benelux countries were among those cited as possible participants and yet the Dutch historically do not want to choose sides among the UK, Germany and France. Siblesz said that a two-speed Europe would pose a major dilemma for the Dutch government. He said that even were the Dutch eventually to join such a movement, they would not do so until after their presidency. Siblesz also said that Italian PM Berlusconi's method of trying to resolve IGC problems through bilateral discussions was a mistake because it deprived him of the peer pressure that would have come out of group sessions. Privately, other officials said it was clear that Chirac was not going to compromise under any circumstance. Siblesz said Chirac was trying to claw back from Nice.

¶2. (C) Subsequently, POL Counselor spoke with Peter de Gooijer, Office Director for EU affairs and a man very close to FM Bot. De Gooijer said the Dutch consider it very important not to jump to the conclusion that the failure in Brussels last weekend automatically opens the possibility of a two-speed Europe. Rather, de Gooijer said they should let the dust settle and tempers ease, then talk to the Irish about how to further the process during the Irish presidency. De Gooijer said that even if the Dutch must assume the IGC, they would be under no obligation to set a deadline for the end of their presidency. He said the Dutch already have a full agenda they do not want to derail: setting the principles for the budget debate and advancing Tampere.

SOBEL